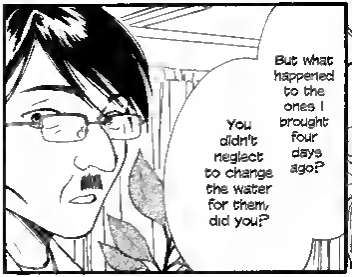
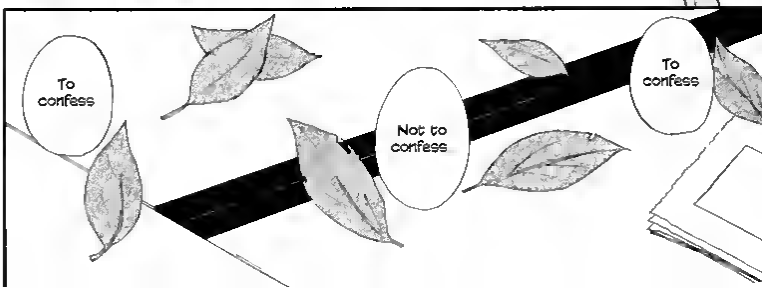
Eighth One:
December at the Shrine



Those sakaki you always bring look as good as ever.



Not... to confess
Sigh...
Satomi
The meeting's about to start
ガラ
The end of the year.
transform into regular salarymen
Around this time, even the shrine priests
Well, then Starting today, we will be collecting donations for next year.
Your respective areas of responsibility can be found on these printouts.

The people we're going to see now are regular contributors, so you don't have to be too nervous about it.
But how do you bring up the subject of money, though?
Just follow my lead, for now.
I wonder if I'm really cut out for this
Extending greetings to our regular customers, is it?
First pick up your map and receipt book.
And the presents prepared by the miko.
I see.
Then again, if we don't stay long enough, it could give them the impression that we're only out fishing for money. It's a tricky business.
If we stay too long, it'll eventually be a bother to them.
And then direct the flow of conversation over to what we're doing to celebrate the new year, in January. From there, it's not much of a stretch to bring up donations.
Hmm, well. In my case, I tend to talk about all the ceremonies and festivals we've held in the past year.

Excuse me
The president will be along shortly
カチャ
Not in my experience, no
When they have a priest take time out to visit, it's not like they'd want to send him home empty-handed
It never happens that they refuse to donate, does it?
Why, thank you.
Pleased to meet you, I am Satomi
This is a new apprentice of ours, he just started this year
Bow
Bow
ズン
Ah, good morning Sorry to intrude on your busy schedule
Seems I was right to go with the glasses look
The ladies over there are totally checking you out, too
Hy, what a young priest
He looks just like Yon-sama*
Ear

*Bae Yong-jun Korean actor seems to appear mostly in TV dramas (often wearing glasses)

But... Manabe-san has finals, so she's off from work.
What's with the slouch?
And besides, haven't you been unusually quiet these last two weeks?
I wonder what she had for lunch today...
Aah, I want to see her face! I want to hear her voice!
FLOP
I'm beat...
The more I think about it, the less I know what to do.
But that would lead to a whole new set of problems.
If I could just start dating her, I could make this suffering go away.
Tomorrow's the day when all the part-timers show up for New Year's preparations.
If you want to know something like that, you should ask her friends.
PAT
More importantly, what does she actually think of me?
That's what I'm *really* worried about!
BANG.
BANG.

WIPE WIPE
The rush at Shichi-go-san seems like a lie now...
YAAAWN
Our gonguji sure overloaded them with candy
The level of service is totally different when there are few people, eh?
Those people are probably the last to come here for that purpose
We're home.
Welcome back.
Keep your voice down!
They'll be past the expiration date soon, anyway
Well, those are leftovers, right?

So how is your first donation drive?
Ah, well, I think I managed somehow...
You're still only 20% done, so hang in there
People, I have something to discuss
I was just out collecting the offerings
And only the box in that blind spot you can't see from the office was completely empty
This is the fifth day in a row
Honsha
本社
Sessha
摂社
Assembly Hall
Massha
末社
Space Repository
社務所
In larger shrine compounds, there's the main shrine, the Honsha, but also smaller shrines such as the auxiliary shrines, the Sessha, dedicated to kami closely related to the one enshrined in the Honsha. Also, subordinate shrines, the Massha which are in a lower standing than the Sessha
The Massha in particular, much due to their bad locations, receive fewer monetary offerings, and of smaller denominations.

Miscalculations are frequent, and the money offerings are used to make up for any discrepancies
Also, there are no cash registers at a shrine and sales of charms and such is done by adding up the totals in one's head
Monetary offerings alone are usually only enough to sustain the salaries of 1-2 employees
With the exception of the box in front of the main shrine, offerings of paper money are few and far apart.
Well... Aside from the main shrine, there are plenty of places for people to get in without anyone noticing, even if we would close the main gate
Not even one yen in there, that's just not normal. You think someone's stealing?
I suppose it's something we'll just have to live with
I think it's a mistake to leave these things unlocked, in this day and age
But our chief priest insists that it shouldn't be necessary...
カラ〜ン
It's not uncommon!
You think it could be some kids from the neighbourhood?
Sure the damage only comes to around 200 yen a day, but if that goes on for a whole month, that's still 6000
You shouldn't underestimate this simply because it's only small change

Oh yeah, I've got a great idea
pat
That money should be used for my bonus! Not squandered by some idiot child at the game center or on buying dirty magazines!
So you're saying, in a year that ends up at 72 000!? in ten years, 720 000!
神様は見ています
<God is watching>
神様見ていてガラッ
And here's 200 yen for bait
GAING
The same strategy as putting a statue of the Virgin Mary in the woods around Mt. Fuji, is it?
The next day.

Aokigahara or the "Sea of Trees" at the base of Mt. Fuji is a popular place to commit suicide. There is indeed a statue of the Virgin Mary there, but I've never heard about it being put there to prevent suicides. Who knows, it might be true.

That didn't do a goddamned thing, now did it!?
If you screw up, you owe us 720 000
That's 10 years' worth
Today, you're going to keep watch here!
It just means this world isn't quite as naive as you are
Why ....?
You demons
ビュー
幸福
交通安全

*Arrow to dispel evil with A lucky item

But it got me thinking, should I really be stocking up on work clothes like that?
A while back, I found some cheap tabi, so I ended up buying a whole bunch
I'm not even sure how long I'm going to want to keep doing this job

I...
Already have a fiancé

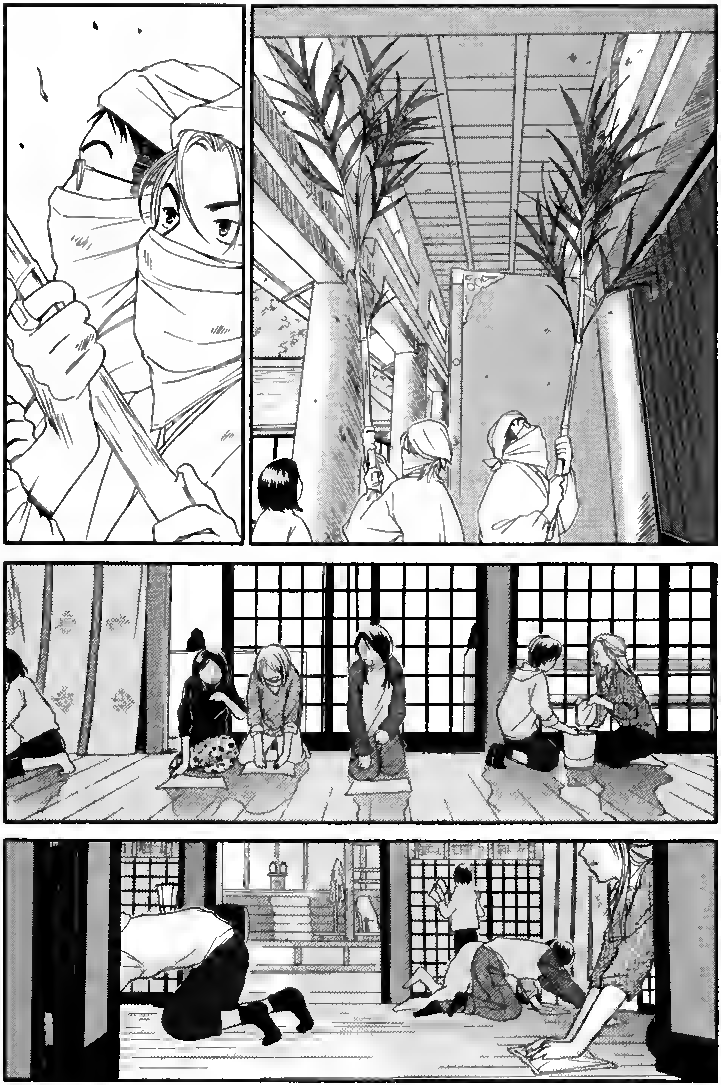
Well, my family is really old-fashioned
And I'm the only daughter
You're kidding, right?
That's like something from the old times, or from a manga or something
You have...
A fiancé..

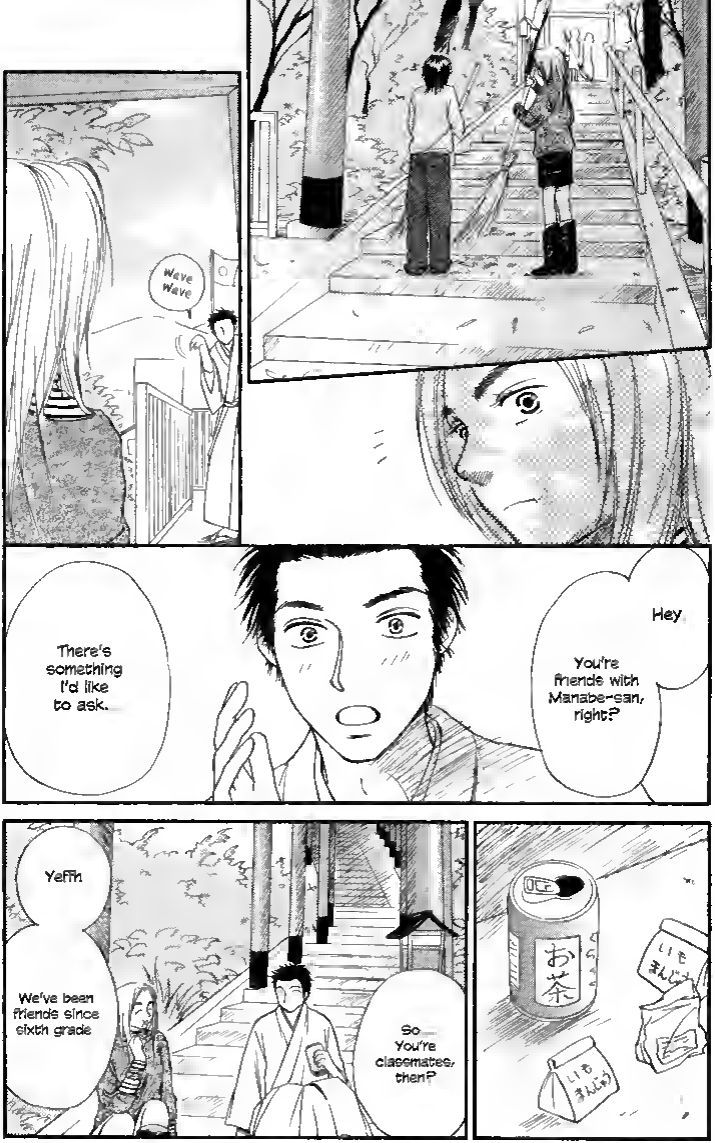
As for Satomi-san, you don't have to worry
Please don't ask me too much about this

But Chiho-chan is still only 15.
It just doesn't seem real.

Ah, but...
...You're even starting to behave like Satomi.
WIGGLE
WIGGLE
But I would be meddling. And I'd hate for it to seem like I'm trying to make him unhappy
Maybe I should tell Satomi-san about this...
since shrines typically stay open around the clock,
アルバイト説明会
Around New Year's,
<Part timer introduction meeting>
70 people at this shrine alone
of course they need substantial reinforcements, in the form of part-time miko

Since being a miko is considered fairly respectable, it's a popular part-time job. In many cases, rules are even in place to prevent anyone who's not an active student from participating.
At the more famous shrines, the process works just by word of mouth, or by referral. They start to get applicants in September already, and by November they usually have more than enough
Like hell I'm going to keep watch in this cold!
ATCHOO
Satomi-san
Long time, no see.
Even among these seventy people, she's still the cutest...





Th s is tea and potato manjuu
(Manjuu being a kind of steamed bun.
With, in th s case, sweet potato filling.)

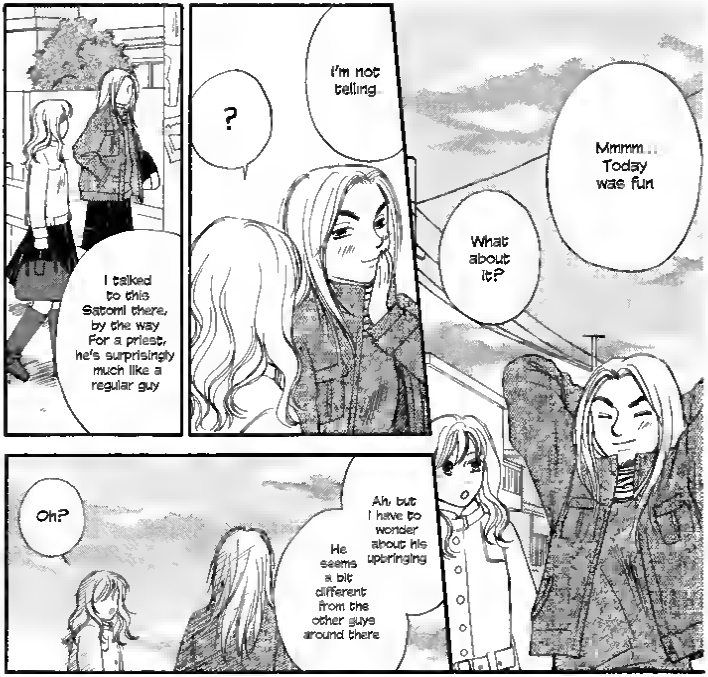
What are you looking at me like that for?
I-I'm only asking as her superior at work!
Ohhh?
That's... I wish I could hear what she was like in middle school
Or something
Well, I suppose it's fine
You bought me these manjuu, so I'll tell you
Ah, I'm the one who recommended she'd try working as a miko
Her parents are really strict, and apparently they don't give her any spending money
You know, it's real easy to get permission from the school to work at, like, a shrine or at the post office
SLAH
SLAH
SLAH
...Are these two really friends?
It's like she's lived a sheltered life, or she doesn't know much about the world, so we couldn't help but give her a makeover
Around the time I got to know her better, she was actually pretty plain
But she never would tell anyone what she was really thinking, so we couldn't figure her out Bit of a problem, really
Let's see She was always good in school, and nice to everyone

HONK
HONK
キャッ
キャッ
I've seen her parents lots of times, but ...
I see. It's because her parents are so strict that she stays over with other people ...
Chiho.
Get in.

That intensity... You don't mean...?
They're definitely not on the straight and narrow.
I tried asking, but she insists that they're "self-employed".
And since that rumour gets around, the guys are all scared to get too close to her, even if she is pretty popular.
So the reason she acts that mature is because of her family?
By the way...
I'm Satomi. Did she ever say anything about me?
The komainu freak?
Hardly.
The head miko's narcissistic ex-boyfriend...?
That's also someone else!
Oh, I know!
You're the nice guy!

Are you all right?
Don't mind me. I was only hit for maximum damage
カ"
!
Ah!
What?

Hmph, that's no fun
I guess the thief never showed up.
Eh? Uhm, yeah, I guess not
There was money in the box today
Looks like that did it
Even though she's that innocent and nice...
It feels like the wall between us only got higher today.
Well then, if you'll excuse me
To think that she's actually the daughter of a yakuza family...

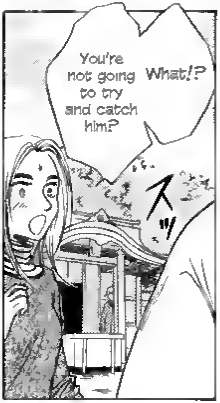

I talked to this Satomi there, by the way
For a priest, he's surprisingly much like a regular guy
?
I'm not telling
Mmmm.. Today was fun
What about it?
Oh?
He seems a bit different from the other guys around there
Ah, but I have to wonder about his upbringing

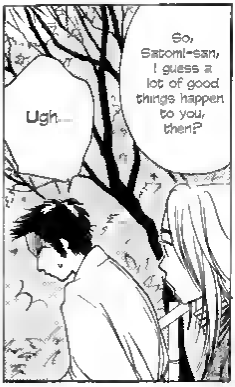
Ah...

Uh—
Waah!
ガタン
ドテッ

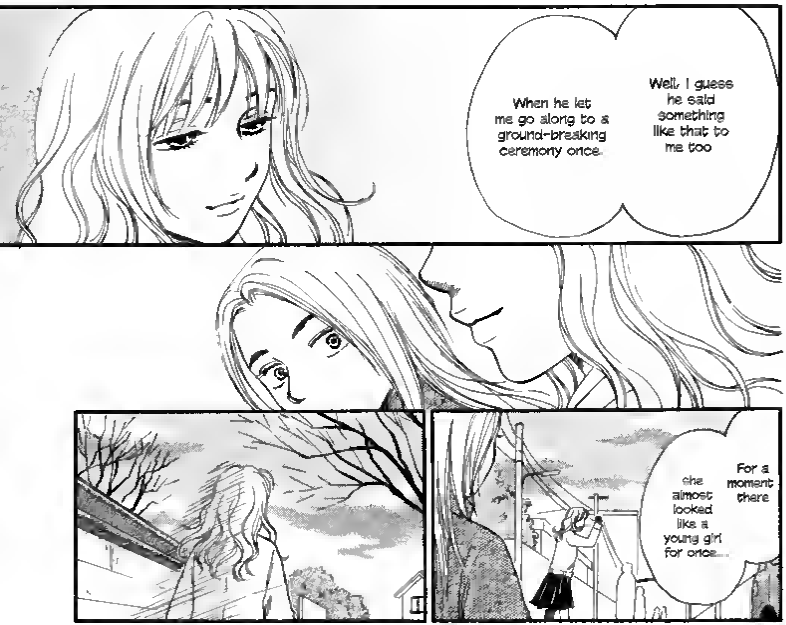
bow

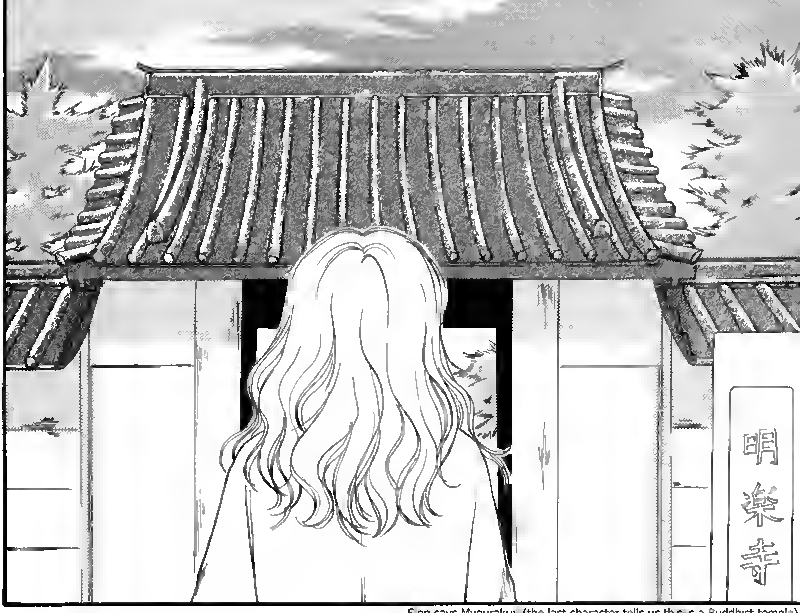
He must be stealing that money just to get by, right?
And it's not like he'll ever come here again


You're not going to try and catch him?
What!?


So, Satomi-san, I guess a lot of good things happen to you, then?
Ugh...

You should take care to help others in need when you can.
Good deeds will eventually come back to you


Well, I guess he said something like that to me too
When he let me go along to a ground-breaking ceremony once.
For a moment there she almost looked like a young girl for once...



Sign says Myourakuji (the last character tells us this is a Buddhist temple)